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Investigate the John Birch Society

The John Birch Society has been incubating a good deal of nonsense during the two years or so since Robert Welch founded it. It is to the right of Louis XIV in its political philosophy, authoritarian in its organization and has frankly borrowed Communist techniques for its avowed purpose of fighting Communists.

Although Mr. Welch is from Massachusetts, its greatest strength seems to be in such places as Southern California and Arizona, where men of means retire to brood on the fate of the Republic.

Ordinarily, an organization whose guiding spirit believes that four Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower, Dr. Milton Eisenhower, Chief Justice Earl Warren, the late John Foster Dulles and his brother, Allan, are all part or dupes of the Communist conspiracy, must be written off as a tassel of fanatic fringe. But the John Birch Society has evidently been growing with speed. It hopes to have 100,000 members by the end of the year.

This may be wishful thinking, but it has at least one acknowledged member in the House of Representatives. It has been publicly attacked by two Republican Senators and the indisputably conservative "Los Angeles Times," after an intensive survey of the society's goals and activities, issued an editorial warning that it represented a "peril to conservatives."

Is the John Birch Society more than that? Is it "authoritative on all levels" as Mr. Welch has said it should be? How closely does it obey directives from the top? Is it dedicated to the proposition that democracy (to quote Mr. Welch again) "is merely a deceptive phrase, a weapon of demagoguery and a perennial fraud"? Is it, in other words, a manifestation of the American right to organize for collective action, however misguided, or is it a conspiracy?

One can readily recognize, looking at the little collection of American Nazis gathered up by George Lincoln Rockwell, the red-eyed hate and primitive irrationality that such a short time ago filled Europe with

concentration camps and gas chambers. Very few Americans (despite the John Birch Society) require further indoctrination in the evils of Communist rule, which has its prison states from the Elbe to the Yellow Sea, and is building a new one on our Caribbean doorstep. But what of these "many prominent men whose backgrounds are above reproach and whose names are well known" (a Society leader's description) who have joined with Welch to revive the dormant divisions and suspicions and fears of the McCarthy era?

Representative Walter has expressed doubt that the Society is a proper subject for investigation by his House Un-American Activities Committee. He says that libelled individuals can have recourse to the civil courts. That is a plain evasion of a plain duty. The American people are entitled to know what the John Birch Society is up to, and how it is going about it. There are certainly better ways of combatting communism here and abroad than by engaging in a suicidal civil war of words.